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Spring 1983

Food News for Consumers

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service:

- Inspects and analyzes domestic and imported meat, poultry, and meat and poultry food products;
- Establishes standards and approves recipes and labels for processed meat and poultry products; and
- Monitors the meat and poultry industries for violations of inspection laws.

Home-Canning Returns to Popularity



Home-canning is on the upswing, particularly among today's young, nutrition-conscious consumers. It's a fine way to save money and serve high-quality meals.

However, for those canning for the first time, care must be taken to follow the canning rules to the letter. Why? Because botulism, a rare but deadly food poisoning, can result from shortcuts or mistakes in accepted canning procedures. Although less than 10 percent of the 20 to 30 cases of botulism reported each year to the Centers for Disease Control prove fatal, this risk should be taken seriously.

Therefore, all home-canners should examine their goods before serving for possible botulism danger signs: loose or bulging lids on Mason jars, liquid that should be clear but has turned milky, or cracked glass jars. Dispose of jars with any of these problems where neither children or animals can reach them. Wash your hands after handling the jars.

To play it safe, boil all home-canned products 10 minutes before serving. Meat, poultry, spinach and corn should be boiled 20 minutes before serving. The boiling renders any botulism toxin that might be present harmless.

If you think someone has contracted botulism, rush that person to a hospital. There is an anti-toxin. But first refrigerate the suspect food, marking it "Danger." It may be needed by doctors caring for the patient, and, if it's a commercial product, public health officials will need to examine it to see if a product recall is necessary.

For further information, two pamphlets -- "Home Canning of Meat and Poultry" and "Home Canning of Fruits and Vegetables" -- are on the sale through the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. See also the FSIS news feature, "What's Wrong with These Home-Canned Foods" (128-83).

Ham News for Easter

Did you ever wonder how ham became the traditional meat for Easter dinner? The answer is that back in the days before refrigeration, hogs were traditionally butchered in the fall. This was done so that the meat could be cured over the cold winter months. The first hams were ready, then, in early spring. A welcome change from monotonous winter fare, hams was often cook's choice for the Easter menu.

President Reagan has designated the week of April 24, 1983, as National Consumer Week. The President's Proclamation appears on page 2.



National Consumers' Week, 1983

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

A major function of our competitive free enterprise economy is to satisfy consumer demand. The effective demand of consumers is what keeps producers in the business of supplying goods and services and is vital to keeping the wheels of industry turning. Therefore, it is most important that we fully recognize the crucial role consumers play in our economy.

Everyone is a consumer, but too often this role is the most neglected in terms of preparation and training. In our complex market economy major decisions have to be made about living within our means; protecting our futures through insurance, pension plans, and investments; choosing goods and services from our global marketplace; and voting on issues directly affecting our public and private consumption. Because consumer and economic education can contribute immeasurably to our competence as consumers and citizens, it should be started in the schools at the earliest possible time.

Consumers should have access to a wide assortment of competitively priced goods and services produced here and abroad; accurate information on product content and care, on contractual agreements, on the cost of credit—essentially whatever facts are needed to make an informed choice. But of greatest importance to consumers and private enterprise is protection against the marketing of goods that are hazardous to health or life, a fair hearing of complaints with appropriate remedies where justified, and dutiful consideration of consumer concerns at all levels of government.

It is clear that the greatest fairness for consumers can be achieved through the active cooperation of business, government, and consumers themselves working to insure equity, increased competition, and safety in our free market economy.

Because an effective and efficient system of commerce depends on an informed and educated public, I urge schools, public and private agencies, and all appropriate public-spirited groups to advance consumer competence by helping provide the necessary consumer and economic information for all our citizens to make well thought-out choices in the marketplace. While the responsibility for consumer education rests primarily with the individual, the communications media and other interested organizations and institutions play an instrumental part in furthering the understanding of American consumers. I urge consumers to avail themselves of this valuable information and to wisely select the goods and services they seek.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate the week beginning April 24, 1983 as National Consumers' Week.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 20th. day of Jan., in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and seventh.

Ronald Reagan

Ham News for Easter (continued from page 1)

The ham news for consumers is that several new "lean," low-fat hams, containing as little as five to seven percent fat, are now on grocery shelves. That's no more fat than you'd get in the lean section of a trimmed round steak, which averages about six percent fat for choice grade.

But ham, for all its fine flavor and high nutritive value, is a delicate meat that requires care. While shopping, look for the ham that is a deep rose or pink color. Place it in the refrigerator as soon as you reach home. It can safely be stored in the refrigerator for a week, or up to two months in the freezer.

Fresh ham must be cooked to an internal temperature of 170° F to kill any trichinae parasites present in the raw meat. And, since ham is also vulnerable to food poisoning produced by the Staphylococcus aureus, or "staph" bacteria, these safety rules should also be observed:

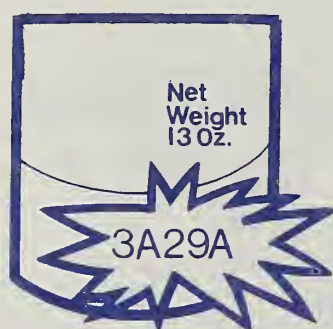
Don't leave ham at room temperature over 2 hours. Keep it cold (40° or lower in the refrigerator) or hot (140° or higher for re-heating).

Use tissues to cover coughs or sneezes. People with colds and sinus infections are prime staph spreaders.

Use gloves to handle foods if you have any kind of skin cut or infection on your hands.

For more ham-handling information, order the feature "Ham FLASH" (249-83).

Recalls—What Happens, What to Do



Consumers hear about recalls every day. Through newspapers, radio and television, we're told to return defective automobiles, toys, household appliances -- almost any item we might use in our daily routine. When meat or poultry is recalled because of spoilage or the presence of food poisoning organisms, the Food Safety and Inspection Service acts quickly to ensure that products are retrieved from marketing channels or returned from consumers' homes as quickly as possible.

A recall of meat or poultry, or any product containing meat or poultry, can be initiated in a number of ways. The most common are routine laboratory sampling of food products by USDA scientists and consumer complaints, either to a federal or local government agency or the manufacturer.

When FSIS finds that meat or poultry must be recalled, its inspectors and compliance officers make sure production of the suspect food has stopped and product already in distribution channels is detained. At the same time, the agency notifies newspapers and radio and television stations in the "recall area" if suspect food has reached retail outlets and might be in the hands of consumers. In addition, the agency notifies state health departments of the problem. Compliance officers then go to distributors and stores in the area to make sure no product is on the shelves. Meanwhile, food processing experts from USDA attempt to determine the cause of the problem and recommend corrective measures to the company involved.

What should you, the consumer, do in the event of a recall? When a recall is announced, check your refrigerator, freezer and pantry for any of the suspect product being recalled. Usually, an identifying code will be given in the recall notice. If you find any of the suspect product, return it to the store where you bought it. Never taste it first to see if it's "bad."

Any consumer who wishes to report an illness related to food, may call the FSIS Meat-borne Hazard Control Center "Hotline" at (301)345-6888. The "hotline" is in service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Meat and Poultry Hotline Answers Consumers' Questions



The electricity went off for four hours last night, and I have \$100 worth of meat in my freezer. Do you think it's spoiled? I found a foreign object in a can of chili. What should I do? If a country ham has mold on the skin, is it safe to eat? How do I know if the fresh turkey I purchased has been federally inspected and how long can it be safely stored in the refrigerator?

Call (202)472-4485.

If you have any questions or complaints concerning the safety or wholesomeness of meat and poultry products, or the truthfulness of their labeling, the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Meat and Poultry Hotline (formerly the Consumer Response System) is the place to call.

This is not a toll-free number, but if you call long-distance, you will only be on-line long enough to give the hotline operator your name and number. Someone will then call you back. Every complaint received about a product under FSIS inspection jurisdiction is investigated.

Written inquiries or complaints should be addressed to: FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. A fact sheet, "FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline -- For Answers to Your Questions" (FSIS-1), also is available.

Food Handlers Campaign Enters Second Year



"Summertime . . . and the livin' is easy." That famous phrase from the popular George Gershwin song describes the long, hot, lazy days of summer. And that's the time of the year when popular delicatessen meat products are most susceptible to food poisoning outbreaks due to mishandling.

Mishandling can occur at any time and at any place. It can happen in plants which process delicatessen meats. It can happen at retail outlets, including delicatessens, supermarkets, restaurants and cafeterias. And it can happen at home.

To counter potential mishandling of delicatessen products at processing plants and by food handlers, the Food Safety and Inspection Service developed special training materials in the spring of 1982 for federal meat and poultry inspectors as well as a flyer and fact sheet to help food handlers. These materials are being redistributed this summer to help reduce the usual hot weather food poisoning outbreaks that can be traced to mishandling of delicatessen products in distribution channels.

FSIS also advises consumers on safe handling of delicatessen products at home: keep them cold (40°F or lower) until serving, and never let them leave at room temperature for more than two hours.

Luncheon meats, including roast beef, corned beef, tongue, salami, pastrami and related products, should not be stored in the refrigerator for more than five days once the vacuum-sealed package is opened. If purchased over-the-counter, deli meats should be consumed in two to three days. Most luncheon meats should not be frozen at all, since the loss of quality would be too great.

Safe handling of delicatessen products is the joint responsibility of many people -- meat and poultry inspectors, food handlers and consumers. This concerted effort is especially important during the upcoming hot, lazy days.

For more information, see "FSIS Facts: Handling Delicatessen Meats" (FSIS-17) and the flyer, "Safe Handling of Delicatessen Meat and Poultry."

Children's Poster Contest in Full Swing

Students in every grade school in the country are learning the importance of reading product labels and how to handle food after purchase in the Department of Agriculture's 1983 Food Safety Poster Contest. This is the third year for the contest, sponsored by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, with financial support from the American Meat Institute, the National Broiler Council and the National Pork Producers Council.

Some 72,000 schools, public and private, received teaching kits in February. The contest runs through mid-April, with winners to be announced in May.

The contest works like this: teachers cover the food safety information in the kits in class, then students draw their posters to show what they've learned.

Every effort has been made to make the contest fun. Sal Monella and Arnie Bacteria, cartoon "germs," are back to show how food poisoning organisms can contaminate food, particularly meat and poultry products, not properly cooked or refrigerated.

The prizes are terrific! First prize winners in each age group -- grades 1-2, 3-4 and 5-6 -- and their teachers win \$200 in U.S. Savings Bonds. Plus, the children and their parents come to Washington all-expenses-paid for a special awards ceremony in May.

For more information, contact Laura Fox, FSIS Public Awareness, Room 1163-S, Washington, D.C. 20250, phone (202)447-9351.

Inspection Stamps Ensure Safe and Wholesome Meat



This official USDA mark for approved meat carcasses is stamped only on major cuts of the carcass, so it may not always be visible on consumer cuts like roasts and steaks. The number on the stamp identifies the plant where the animal was slaughtered.



This mark appears on all prepackaged processed meat products -- from beef stew to frankfurters -- that have been inspected and passed by USDA. The number following "EST." indicates the plant where a product was processed.



All federally approved poultry -- fresh, frozen or processed products -- carry this stamp. However, the inspection mark may not always appear on fresh poultry which has been bulk-shipped and then packaged at the retail level. Like the two examples above, "P-42" tells FSIS where the poultry was slaughtered or the product processed.

For more information, see "FSQS Facts: Meat and Poultry Inspection" (FSQS-18).

**New
On-the-Farm
Test Detects
Drug Residues
in Live Animals**

A new test developed by USDA for on-the-farm use will help assure that meat sold to consumers does not contain unsafe drug residues. USDA is working with the Food and Drug Administration and farm producer organizations to encourage farmers to use a new test that shows whether a live animal ready for market has traces of antibiotics in its body. Called the Live Animal Swab Test (LAST), this easy-to-perform animal urine test gives farmers an answer on antibiotic residues overnight.

The test was developed by USDA scientists for checking cows, calves and heifers. If the test shows antibiotics in the urine, the animal also might have traces left in its kidneys, liver, fat and meat. And, if sent to slaughter, it could be condemned for violative levels of antibiotics. Farmers rely on antibiotics to treat the diseases and infections that might afflict their animals. However, because of concerns about the effect of drug residues in meat on consumers, USDA and the Food and Drug Administration strictly regulate on-the-farm drug use and monitor residue levels in slaughtered farm animals.

To teach farmers about LAST, USDA will produce a booklet, "How to Perform the Live Animal Swab Test for Antibiotic Residues," which will be available by late spring 1983. An audio tape giving step-by-step instructions for performing the test is also planned.

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Getting farmers to perform the LAST test on their livestock is just one of the objectives of the Residue Avoidance Program -- a cooperative project involving USDA, the Food and Drug Administration, farm producer organizations and groups representing the agricultural industry. This educational program will help farmers identify points in their production systems where contamination could occur and will help assure consumer confidence in the quality of the nation's meat and poultry supply.

**USDA
Inspection
Keeps Pace
with Consumer
Demand**

Matching the great consumer demand for meat and poultry in this country, in 1982 federal inspectors for USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service checked 130 million head of livestock, 4.5 billion birds and 108 billion pounds of processed meat and poultry products. These and other statistics and information related to meat and poultry inspection are available in FSIS' 1982 annual report to Congress, which provides a comprehensive overview of the agency's activities for the past year.

One such activity is the inspection of meat and poultry imported into the United States. In 1982, foreign countries exported almost two billion pounds of meat -- everything from fresh beef to canned hams -- to the United States. This product must meet USDA's strict standards that allow only safe and wholesome product into U.S. marketing channels. FSIS rejected 10.5 million pounds for reasons ranging from improper export certificates to antibiotic residues.

Other subjects addressed in the annual report include steps to inform consumers about the relationship between sodium and health and how to reduce sodium in the diet; development of recommendations on food safety legislation reform; and implementation of new regulations on the composition of meat products.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act requires FSIS to provide a report on its activities each year to the Congress. Copies of the report may be ordered free of charge from FSIS Public Awareness, Rm. 1163-S, Washington, D.C. 20250.

1982 Yearbook of Agriculture—Something for Everyone



The 1982 Yearbook of Agriculture, "Food -- From Farm To Table," is good reading for just about everybody.

The yearbook has three sections: Changing Economics of Agriculture, Farm Marketing in a New Environment, and Food Buying -- Making Decisions.

"We in the U.S. Department of Agriculture assist in providing efficiency throughout the food chain -- from the production of food to its use in nutritious, satisfying meals," says Secretary John Block. "People around the country benefit from authoritative information about agriculture and food, developed by experts from inside and outside the department."

Sale copies are available at government bookstores in many cities or may be purchased by sending a check or money order for \$12 to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20240. Copies are also available from members of Congress.

Product Label Approval—No Longer Time-Consuming

The old look in meat and poultry product label approval at USDA was that nearly all new labels and label changes had to be approved by special reviewers at Washington headquarters. But that was time-consuming and costly, both for food processors and for the department.

The new look in label approval, effective June 1, will be that USDA inspectors in processing plants will be able to approve a substantial number of routine labels. This will make for more efficient plant operation, and, very possibly, dollar savings for consumers.

This field approval system will cut in about half the number of labels now approved at Washington headquarters -- some 120,000 each year -- and reduce the time it takes to approve a single label from the present 3 weeks, if done by mail, to less than an hour. That's how long it took field inspectors participating in a pilot study of the new method.

The new system will set up three categories of labels:

- 1) Those involving complex or unique problems -- such as nutrition labeling or changes in product formulation -- which will continue to be handled at headquarters;
- 2) Labels which can be approved by a field inspector -- including labels for products with only one ingredient and labels for which the Washington staff has already approved a preliminary sketch; and
- 3) A category requiring no USDA approval by either headquarters or field staff -- such as minor changes in label size and product net weight claims.

While most food processors will probably want to use the new procedure, participation will be voluntary. Packers can opt for in-plant approval, or apply directly to Washington. Even if they choose to go with in-plant approval, they can always appeal a plant inspector's denial to headquarters.

For additional information, see the press release, "USDA Permits Label Approval by In-Plant Inspectors" (278-83) and background paper, "Approval of Labels for Meat and Poultry Products."



USDA Expands Requirements for Meat Imports

A new FSIS regulation requires foreign countries exporting meat to the United States to test the muscle, liver and kidney tissue of slaughtered animals for chemicals that could be harmful to humans. Tests of fat tissue for chemicals have previously been required, but some chemicals can be present in amounts too small to be detected in this tissue.

Under federal meat inspection laws, countries exporting meat or poultry products to the United States must have national inspection programs at least equal to U.S. inspection programs. This new rule will help ensure that the "at least equal to" requirement is strictly followed.

Since most countries had already begun this testing even before FSIS proposed the regulation last summer, it merely formalizes procedures already in place in most exporting countries. The rule, which appeared in the Feb. 10 Federal Register, also clarifies that foreign meat imports are subject to the same inspection standards for quality, sanitation, species verification and residue levels as domestic meat.

For more information, see the press release, "USDA Expands and Clarifies Requirements for Meat Imports" (145-83).

Other FSIS News

USDA redefines basic workweek for meat and poultry inspectors. Press Release #153-83 (2-14-83).

USDA proposes to ban use of mature poultry kidneys as human food. Press Release #195-83 (3-1-83).

USDA extends comment period on cured pork proposal. Comment period ends April 25. Press Release #206-83 (3-2-83).

USDA study recommends expanding inspection exemption provisions. Press Release #225-83 (3-4-83).

Meat and poultry advisory committee to meet in Washington April 13 and 14. Press Release #240-83 (3-10-83).

USDA keeps adulterated veal out of consumer channels. Press Release #281-83 (3-18-83).

How to Obtain Free Copies

Single free copies of press releases, Federal Register reprints, studies, fact sheets, and publications mentioned in the FSIS section of this newsletter are available from FSIS Public Awareness, Room 1163-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: (202) 447-9351.

Who can Answer Your Questions

If you have a question or a problem with the safety or wholesomeness of a meat or poultry product, or the truthfulness of its labeling, contact FSIS Consumer Inquiries, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250 or call (202) 472-4485.

Where to Send Comments

Send your comments on proposals in the FSIS section to: Regulations Coordination Division, Room 2637-S, FSIS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Usually two copies are requested. Be sure to identify the proposal you are commenting on by referring to the title of informal proposals or, for formal proposals, the date of publication in the Federal Register.

USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service:

- Maintains USDA's Nutrient Data Bank;
 - Conducts the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey;
 - Monitors nutrient content of the U. S. food supply;
 - Provides nutrition guidelines for education and action programs;
 - Collects and disseminates food and nutrition materials; and
 - Conducts nutrition education research.
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Maternal and Infant Nutrition Subject of Teleconference

A nation-wide video teleconference on nutrition aimed at improving the health of American mothers and babies will be held April 7, 1983, under a cooperative effort by USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The program, scheduled from 2-5 p.m. EST, will be telecast live from Washington, D.C., simultaneously to about 60 sites across the country. The primary audience is professionals who provide nutrition and health services to mothers and infants. This includes nutritionists, physicians and nurses working in public health and community programs, and food and nutrition specialists in USDA's State Cooperative Extension Service.

The purpose of the conference is to increase nutrition and health professionals' knowledge and understanding of new research findings in nutrition as they relate to maternal and infant health. Substance abuse during pregnancy and breastfeeding and human lactation are the two major issues that will be covered in the program.

The teleconference will:

- Provide the audience with an update on research, with emphasis on practical application;
- Allow the audience, through the program's interactive segments, to communicate directly with recognized authorities in the field;
- Provide an opportunity for improved cooperation and collaboration among various professional groups involved in the maternal and infant nutrition area;
- Demonstrate an innovative and cost-effective method of providing continuing education to nutrition and health professionals.

For more information about the video teleconference, contact the public health nutritionist in your state health department or the food and nutrition specialist in your state cooperative extension service.

Eating Habits - Some Surprising Findings

Is breakfast really the one meal people are most likely to skip? Do women snack more often than men? USDA's Health and Nutrition Information Service answered these and other questions about consumers' eating habits in an analysis of its Nationwide Food Consumption Survey, 1977-78.

For the survey, researchers studied the diets of a select number of individuals for three days and found that lunch, not breakfast, was the meal most often skipped. In fact, only 64 percent of the survey group ate three meals each of the three days. Twenty-eight percent had three meals on at least one of the three days. And eight percent had only two meals or less on each of the three days studied.



HNIS also found that women snacked less than men, and blacks snacked less than whites. Those people who ate three meals on each of the three days snacked the least, and snacking decreased with age.

Forty percent of those surveyed had all of their meals over the three day period from home food supplies. And those who had three meals every day were more likely to eat at home than those who ate irregularly. Most of the people ate at least some meals alone.

Cost of Food at Home Declines

The cost of food for USDA's four food plans was about two and one-half percent lower in December 1982 than it was six months earlier. This means that consumers probably spent less money for the same amount of food in the latter half of 1982. USDA's Health and Nutrition Information Service regularly figures costs for thrifty, low-cost, moderate-cost and liberal food plans. Each plan contains enough food to provide nutritious diets for family members.

A four member family -- a husband, wife and two children, aged 6 to 11 years -- following the moderate-cost food plan would have spent \$401.20 in December, compared to \$411.90 in June. Costs for the thrifty food plan -- used by USDA in setting food stamp benefits -- were \$250.00 for December, down from \$255.70 for June.

This is the first such decline since USDA established the food plans seven years ago and began keeping records of their costs.

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HNIS is revising its food plans to reflect current food consumption patterns and nutritional criteria based on 1980 Recommended Dietary Allowances. Each month HNIS releases the cost of food to a family based on the four food plans. Those costs will be calculated from the revised plans beginning in spring 1983.

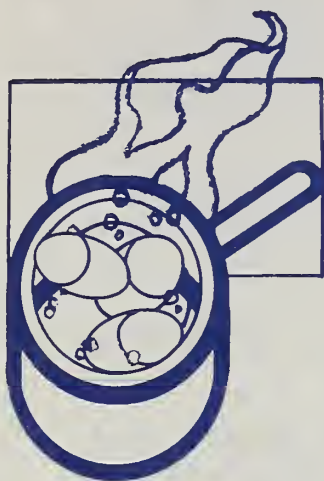
USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service:

- Operates a variety of marketing programs and services--several of interest to consumers--that include:
 - Developing grades and standards for the trading of food and other farm products and carrying out grading services on request from packers and processors;
 - Inspecting egg products for wholesomeness;
 - Administering marketing orders that aid in the marketing of milk, fruits, vegetables and related specialty crops like nuts; and
 - Administering truth-in-seed labeling and other regulatory programs.
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Helpful Hints on Hard-Cooked Eggs

How long can hard-cooked eggs be safely stored in the refrigerator? If hard-cooked eggs are discolored, should they be eaten? What should be done with eggs that crack while being hard-cooked?

These are some of the questions consumers frequently ask about hard-cooked eggs, a food item that is extremely popular with American consumers, especially during the Easter holiday. To get the most value out of hard-cooked eggs, here are some helpful consumer hints:



- When properly refrigerated, hard cooked eggs will last for over a month.
- If the eggs have a green discoloration between the yolk and the egg white, don't despair. They are still perfectly edible. The discoloration is caused by a chemical reaction during cooking between the sulfur in the white and the iron in the yolk. While unattractive, it's harmless.
- Eggs that crack while being hard-cooked are still good. They should be used within one-to-two days, however, or they may dry out.
- All hard-cooked eggs should be refrigerated until ready for use, either in the shell or out. If the shells are removed, store the eggs in a tightly closed container or place them in plastic wrap to preserve freshness.
- If raw and hard-cooked eggs become mixed in the refrigerator, try spinning them to discover which is which. Cooked eggs will spin, raw eggs will not. Why? The raw egg yolk is much heavier than the egg white so the egg is unbalanced. But when the egg is hard-cooked, the yolk and egg white are the same density so the egg spins easily.

Clean, graded eggs that have sound, unbroken or uncracked shells are the best choice for hard cooking. The USDA grade shield on the carton means the eggs have been certified for quality under USDA supervision, are of the specified quality grade and were packed in a plant that meets USDA's rigid sanitary requirements.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service

- Administers food programs, including:
 - The food stamp program;
 - The national school lunch and school breakfast programs;
 - The special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children (WIC); and
 - The food distribution, child care food, summer food service and special milk programs.
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Men: The New Family Shoppers

Once considered strictly "women's work," grocery shopping is more and more being taken over by the men of the family. In fact, about one-third of today's supermarket shoppers are men.

Changes in lifestyle account for some of the reasons men now venture into the grocery stores in greater numbers. More men live alone, maintain families without a wife present or share more responsibilities in the home -- like food shopping -- as their wives join the work force.

While many men have enjoyed cooking for years, others are newcomers to the kitchen and may be bewildered at first about what to buy. Nutrition education materials and shopping guides have been targeted mostly toward women in the past. But, the basics of good nutrition and sensible shopping are easy to pick up -- for both men and women.



- Avoid overbuying bargains. Buy only reasonable amounts of food that can be used before spoiling.
- Plan ahead and keep in mind preparation time needed and whether your schedule can accommodate that time. Consider how leftovers might be used.
- Look at the unit cost of foods when comparing selections. If you like, take a pocket calculator along when you go shopping to figure the best deals.
- Learn how to use and prepare less expensive cuts of meat. It will save you money.
- Make a list of the items you need before you go to the store. And don't shop when you are hungry, or you could end up buying food you don't really need.
- You'll spend less money on food if you shop once a week, rather than stopping to buy something on impulse every couple of days.

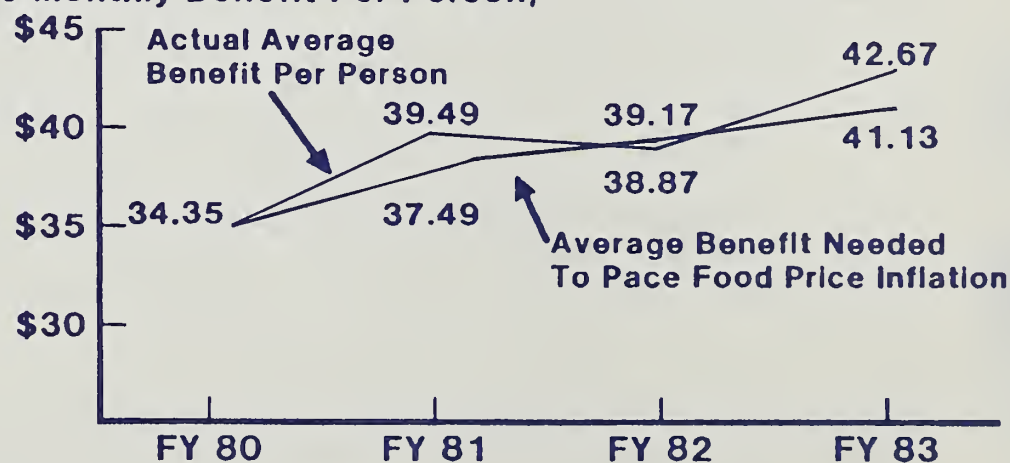
The basics of good nutrition and good shopping are simple: plan ahead, read labels and eat a variety of foods everyday from the four basic food groups -- vegetables and fruits; breads and cereals; milk and cheese; and meat, poultry, fish and beans.

Food Stamp Purchasing Stays Ahead of Inflation

The average benefits for each person in USDA's Food Stamp Program are staying ahead of inflation. Individual food stamp benefits gained 24 percent in purchasing power between 1980 and 1982. During that period, food prices increased 20 percent.

The actual benefit for each person averages \$43 each month. If benefit increases had been tied to the rate of inflation, benefits would average only \$41 each month. The food stamp program increases the food purchasing power of low-income persons in order to help them obtain a more nutritious diet.

(Average Monthly Benefit Per Person)



School Lunch Is Still a Bargain

If you think your children are getting a more nutritious, cheaper meal by taking a brown bag lunch to school instead of buying lunch in the cafeteria, think again.

According to food service officials in several states, school lunches are not only cheaper, but also more nutritious. When one county's food service officials compared the cost of identical lunches -- two bag lunches prepared at home to two "super sack" lunches bought at school -- they found that the homemade lunches cost considerably more.

A recent USDA study of 7,000 U.S. families found that students participating in school lunch programs get higher daily intakes for 6 of 12 important nutrients than do students not participating in these programs. The study showed that students in the lunch program also get more protein, calcium and phosphorous, with less caloric intake, than other students.

School lunches may well be safer too. When sack lunches are prepared at home, it's unlikely that the hot food will stay hot, or the cold food cold -- requirements necessary to prevent the possible growth of food poisoning organisms. The food in brown bag lunches left at room temperature for several hours could spoil and cause illness.

So if you think that "brown-bagging-it" is cheaper for you and better for your kids, reconsider. It seems that school lunches still are the best buy in town for school children.

Food and Nutrition Magazine for Sale

"Food and Nutrition" magazine -- a quarterly publication that covers a wide range of issues managed by FNS -- is available by subscription from the Government Printing Office. The January 1983 issue offers technical advice for school lunch managers, showing how school districts can save financially troubled food services. The October 1982 issue highlighted some of the ways public and private groups are working together to provide food and nutrition education to needy people.

"Food and Nutrition" can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Yearly subscriptions cost \$7.50 domestic and \$9.40 foreign. Single copies cost \$2.75 domestic and \$3.45 foreign.

USDA's Economic Research Service:

- Analyzes international activities of agricultural significance;
- Does research on commodities, food and nutrition, natural resources, and rural development; and
- Furnishes timely and objective economic and statistical information to farmers, other rural Americans, industries, consumers, and policy-makers.

Where Your Food Dollar Goes

Americans spent an average of about one dollar out of every six dollars of after-tax income last year on food -- nearly \$1,500 per person. The 1982 retail expenditures for foods produced on U.S. farms, excluding imported foods and fishery products, totaled \$298 billion, USDA's Economic Research Service reported in the Winter 1983 issue of its publication, "National Food Review" (NFR-21).

Payments to farmers in 1982 totaled \$85 billion, or 29 cents of the food dollar. Seventy-one cents of the food dollar -- \$213 billion all together -- went to cover the marketing bill. In 1979, the marketing bill took only 67 cents of the food dollar. The farm value for that year was 33 cents.

ERS noted that the farm value's share of food expenditures varies greatly among foods, depending on what goes into making them and the complexity of the marketing process. In general, animal products have the highest ratios of farm value to retail price, while highly-processed crop products have the lowest. For example, the farm value of meats is 50 to 60 percent of the retail price, compared with only about 14 percent of bakery and cereal products.

American Eating Places Gain More of Consumer Dollar



In a story appearing in the "National Food Review," Winter 1983, ERS reported that American consumers are spending more of their food dollar to "eat out" today than they did two decades ago. Thirty-seven cents of each food dollar in 1981 was spent at sitdown service restaurants, fast food outlets and other food service operations. In 1960, only 26 cents of each food dollar was spent in this way.

What's behind this surge in eating out? ERS attributes it to greater family buying power, resulting from rising per capita income, more multiple-earner households and smaller households.

Fast food eating places are taking the greatest share of this away-from-home food expenditure. These restaurants now take two of every five dollars spent at eating places, compared with only one of every seven dollars in 1963.

Consumers spent \$120 billion in 1981 for food purchased away from home. This represents 35 percent of the total \$320 billion spent on all food expenditures for that year. In comparison, 1960 figures show that only \$19 billion of the \$72 billion spent on food in that year -- 26 percent of total food costs -- was for food eaten outside the home.

1983 Food Price Outlook Good for Consumers

Retail food prices in 1982 had their lowest annual increase since 1976, averaging only four percent above 1981 costs, according to USDA's Economic Research Service. The four percent rise marks the seventh time in the last eight years that food price gains have been less than the general inflation rate.

ERS expects moderate food price increases of three to six percent in 1983. This reflects record wheat, corn and soybean crops harvested last year; greater production of fruits and vegetables; a slow recovery for consumer food demand and agricultural export demand; and a lower general inflation rate.

Economists for ERS say that the increase for food prices this year should be three to six percent in grocery stores and four to six percent at restaurants and other food service establishments. A four percent increase is the most likely, according to the economists.

Not only did large production and sluggish demand help keep farm prices down, though. Food marketing costs also slowed last year, increasing only five percent. This compares with an 11 percent jump in 1981. More moderate food marketing costs parallel the decline in the general rate of inflation, which fell from 10.4 percent in 1981 to 6.1 percent in 1982.

For more information see the ERS publication, "National Food Review" (NFR-21), Winter 1983.

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